



Friends of Clifton Park Open Space, P.O. Box 821, Clifton Park, New York 12065

Steering Committee

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December 12, 2005

Letters to the Editor
Community News
Clifton Corporate Park
Clifton Park, New York 12065

Subject: Town of Clifton Park Open Space Coordinator Position

“Now is the time to make a fiscal and codified commitment to insure the benefits outlined in the Open Space Plan. Our town is in solid financial shape to take on this task. The town has sufficient acreage to accommodate both development and open space protection. And the public support exists, both in our town and other throughout Saratoga County, to sustain—even demand—this kind of policy.”

These comments were made by Friends of Clifton Park Open Space (FCPOS) before Town Board in March, 2003, before the final Open Space Plan was unanimously approved in May of that year. Now, coming up on three years later, we make the same requests as the Town’s budget for 2006 addresses the position of Open Space Coordinator (OSC)—a recommendation in the Open Space Plan of pivotal importance. The Town Board has put forward a plan to fund the Open Space Coordinator position by using funds previously dedicated to another position in the Planning Department, which is being vacated. FCPOS believes that this represents a half-measure, which will not adequately accomplish the goals of the Open Space Plan, and could impede the functions of a very busy Planning Department.

Administration of the Town’s Open Space Plan needs to be solidified. It needs an established view of what properties the town would like to acquire and why. It needs established budget items to pursue specific funding for targeted parcel types as identified in the Plan. It needs a full-time, professional administrative staff position to be budgeted and filled. The size of our town and the importance of working proactively dictate that this job cannot be shared with other responsibilities.

The Town has put in place an array of tools, such as Conservation Easements, Purchase and Transfer of Development Right programs, etc., which promote a willing buyer-willing seller concept so important to the success of this plan. However, the actual implementation of these programs necessitates that the town have an administrator in place to work with these potential players to understand, educate and promote these programs on an ongoing basis.

Today much of the work on open space in the town continues to be voluntary with the good work of the Town's Open Space Committee as aided by our professional but over-burdened Town Planner. We are lucky to have such a dedicated and talented group of individuals willing to work and to volunteer their time and expertise. However, this is the appearance of substance rather than real substance.

The Open Space Plan document itself stated, "The program will also require someone being responsible for coordinating all open space program implementation actions on behalf of the town board and open space committee, and be accountable for measuring program accomplishments and informing the town board likewise of any obstacles to program success." The Town's Open Space Committee has detailed a specific job description for the Open Space Coordinator, which is, at least, a full time position. The Open Space Committee, which took the pulse of the town's citizens like no other committee had previously done, should be a substantial part of the team vested with the interviewing and hiring a professionally trained person to fill the OSC position.

With the Open Space Coordinator in place, he/she can actively pursue the most promising opportunities to make the Open Space Plan a reality. That person can research and document the most advantageous parcels, work with interested citizens on the acquisition of parcels by a variety of means, and present their findings to the Town Board for further action. Selections should not be random or based solely on what becomes available, but should reflect a more comprehensive view of what the Town needs and wants according to the Open Space and Comprehensive Plans. This person would also seek and secure available funding support opportunities from various sectors.

The Open Space Plan was developed with expansive public involvement and passed with a swell of public support. It is important that citizens continue to be educated and involved on these issues. It is our hope that the Open Space Coordinator will be able to fulfill some of this marketing role as parcels are identified and designated as desirable in order to proactively continue our tradition of willing buyer and willing seller.

All of the following objectives require a full time Open Space Coordinator:

- Research - Inventory
- Documentation and Selection
- Acquisition
- Public Communication – Education
- Implementation
- Coordination
- Accountability

It is time to allocate specific funding, hire professional staff, actively work to identify what appropriate tools in the Town's very impressive array of supplies can be used to acquire and protect

the kind of open space preservation we need in order to balance the town's continued growth and development. It has been this balance between open space and development, between rural and commercial convenience that has helped to make our town so attractive and our financial position so enviable. A full-time, professionally trained, Open Space Coordinator will help protect this balance in the future.

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